

Thinking Allowed

On first Thursday mornings of every month in Lounge, thinking is not only allowed, it is encouraged and so is open discussion of any and all of the thoughts. For this past year, between ten and fifteen people, including a few Carrs Laners, have gathered regularly, in an atmosphere of trust, to ask questions and to ponder issues of faith and doubt with honesty and openness.

'Only a Story...?' was the theme for 2016. Over the year, we explored the uses of story and, individually, the nature and purposes of myth, parable and metaphor. We entered into one person's story (Holloway's *Leaving Alexandria*), everyone's story (Bennett's *Talking Heads*) and told our own stories. We interrogated the creeds, considered what happens when the story becomes more important than the reality (Owen Jones *The Establishment*) and, following the lectures' day, we mulled over the death and rebirth of stories (Jack Spong *Biblical Literalism: a Gentile Heresy*). The general opinion when we looked back over the theme was that it had been one of the best we had chosen for its interest, cohesion and depth, and still had potential.

In looking to 2017, the topic of story remained in our minds. Is story something to be understood by us or is it ours to create? Do stories then create life or allow us closure? These ideas hovered around as we thought about other suggestions. In a turbulent year to come on both the national and world stages, where do we stand on values and how do we make them explicit? Evangelism is an uncomfortable concept if its only intention is to get people into church; what does a responsibility to evangelise entail? What does salvation mean in a 21st century world? How far might the image of a boat, so abundantly full of fish that it threatens to sink, be a truer metaphor for salvation than that of a man dying on a cross? Where does that leave us with theologies like substitutional atonement? What does it mean to be liberal/progressive in faith and life? And finally, could we learn more about the Jewish liturgical year and how we might read the gospels through a new lens?

After a fascinating discussion around these nuggets, we came up with a title for our 2017 theme: **Liberal Evangelism – an Oxymoron? Where do we stand?** The detailed plans which emerged – amazingly - will be published when everyone in the group has seen them in print. All of us are grateful for the opportunities to be challenged and to ponder questions we might not otherwise encounter. Everyone is looking forward to more stimulating conversations around these ideas and one new member, who has joined the group this year, admitted that her diary is now planned around first Thursdays!

You would be very welcome to join us! 10.15 am on every first Thursday...

Julie Grove